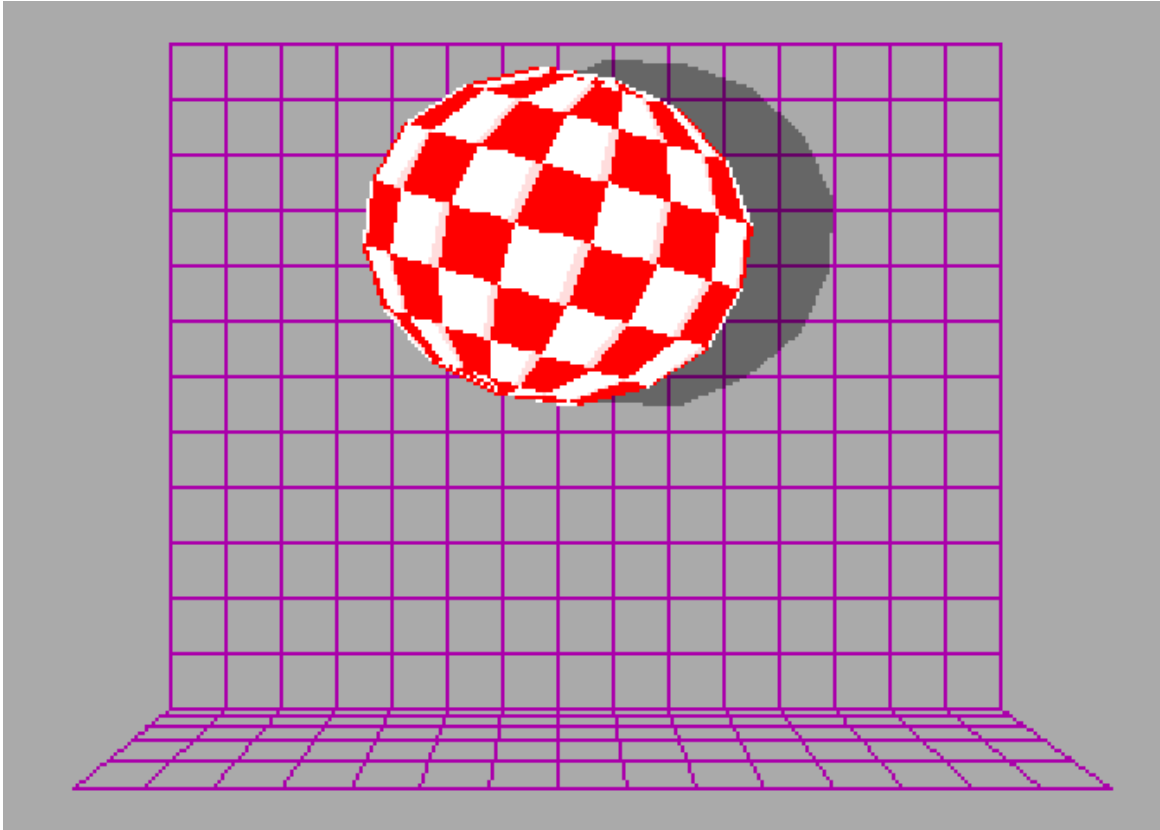


Amiga emulation - back with a boing!

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

Let me take you back, no not through the streets of London. Do I look like Ralph McTell to you? We're going boldly where not all that many people have been for, oh, at least a good while; planet Amiga! My love affair with the Amiga began back in 1991 when lots of historically important events relating to this particular era were taking place and other equally fascinating early '90s trends were all the rage.



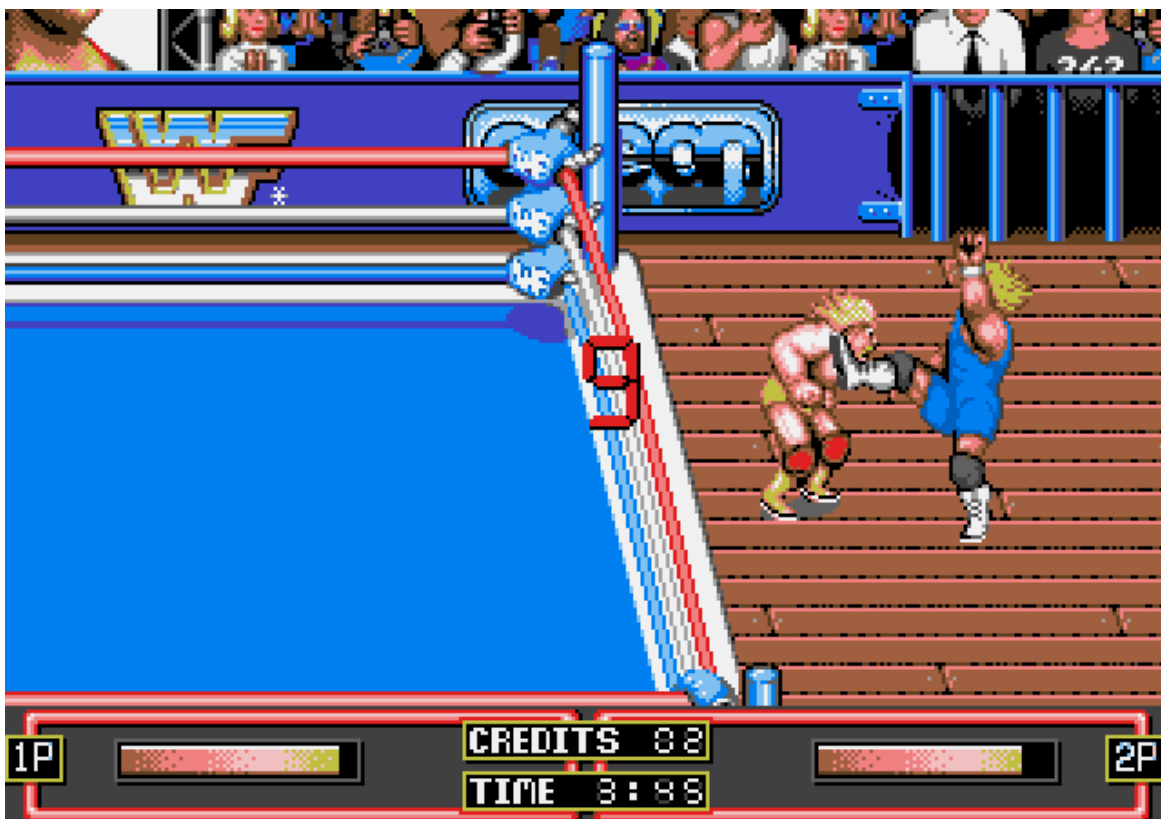
I was eleven years old and was about to embark on what was then known as the 11+, the exam you took in the fourth and final year of junior school which would shape your destiny for the next five years, and possibly even the rest of your life. Pass and you went to grammar school. Fail and you went to a comprehensive school. It was assumed that going to the local comprehensive would either turn you into a hardened criminal overnight or result in you being mercilessly bullied for half a decade. In contrast, prepubescent legend had it that by going to the local grammar school, you would be transformed into a snotty, elitist swot and thereby develop a forehead much like that of the white-coated Tefal professors.

Naturally, the truth fell somewhere in between this extreme dichotomy, but in any case, this is irrelevant to my preamble. If I passed the exam, as a reward, I was promised a gleaming, mystical Amiga 500. Well, that's not *totally* accurate; I was promised *half* an Amiga 500 since they were so darn expensive (£399.99 at the time). Because this was such a hefty price tag,

we came to an arrangement whereby my brother would pay for half of it, I'd 'win' the other half and we'd share it.

Now, bribing one child to perform well at school while simultaneously having the other - who would never have the same opportunities to do so - pay for the same gift, raises the issue of dubious parenting skills, but I think Oprah has this one covered so I'll move on.

As I expect you can guess, I passed the exam and we became the proud owners of a state of the art games machine. I say *games* machine, yet I think what really convinced my parents to buy it for us was reeling off the notorious cliché, "it will help with our school work and teach us essential information technology skills". I imagine most kids and adults alike can relay a similar story; it's a magical classic which will never lose its parent-leveraging potency.



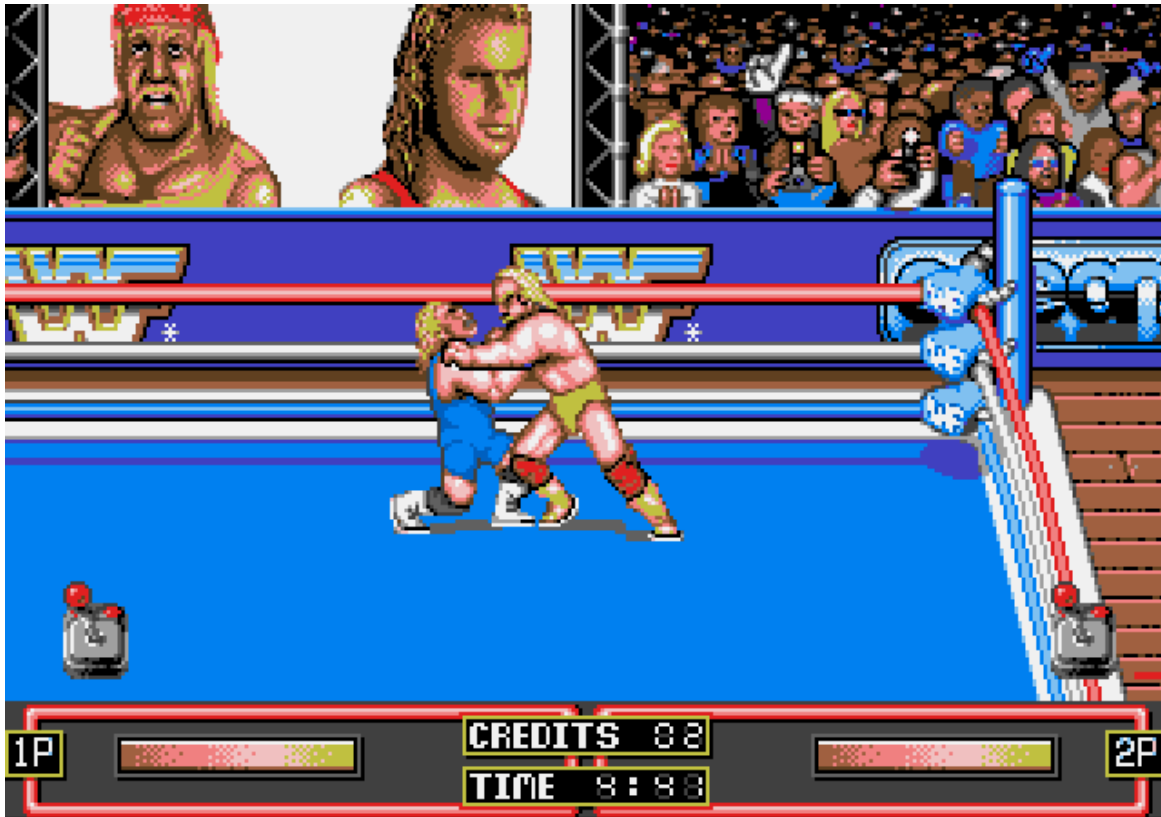
When you adopt and retire as many joysticks as we did, it says a hell of a lot about how much use a computer is getting.

Nevertheless, playing computer games just wouldn't account for the sheer number of broken joysticks we managed to accrue; to blame was Wrestlemania, or more to the point my brother *playing* Wrestlemania. Let me explain: before I came to my senses, I liked to watch WWF wrestling, as did my brother. I was young and impressionable, OK? We liked wrestling so much we bought Ocean's Wrestlemania, and from then on, fought against one another day and night.



So far so good you might say, far better than pounding each other into the ground for real, so why would this ring the death knell for so many joysticks? Well, remember the stranglehold thingies (he says as he tries to pretend he doesn't know the technical term) you're able to engage in if you bump into your opponent without pressing any buttons? Whenever you get into this position, you have to waggle the joystick from left to right as quickly as possible to throw your opponent onto the floor before attempting to squish them into oblivion; the person who waggles the fastest wins the tussle (you can keep your smutty jokes to yourself, this is a family guide :p). Despite telling my brother to go easy with it what must have been hundreds of times, he never

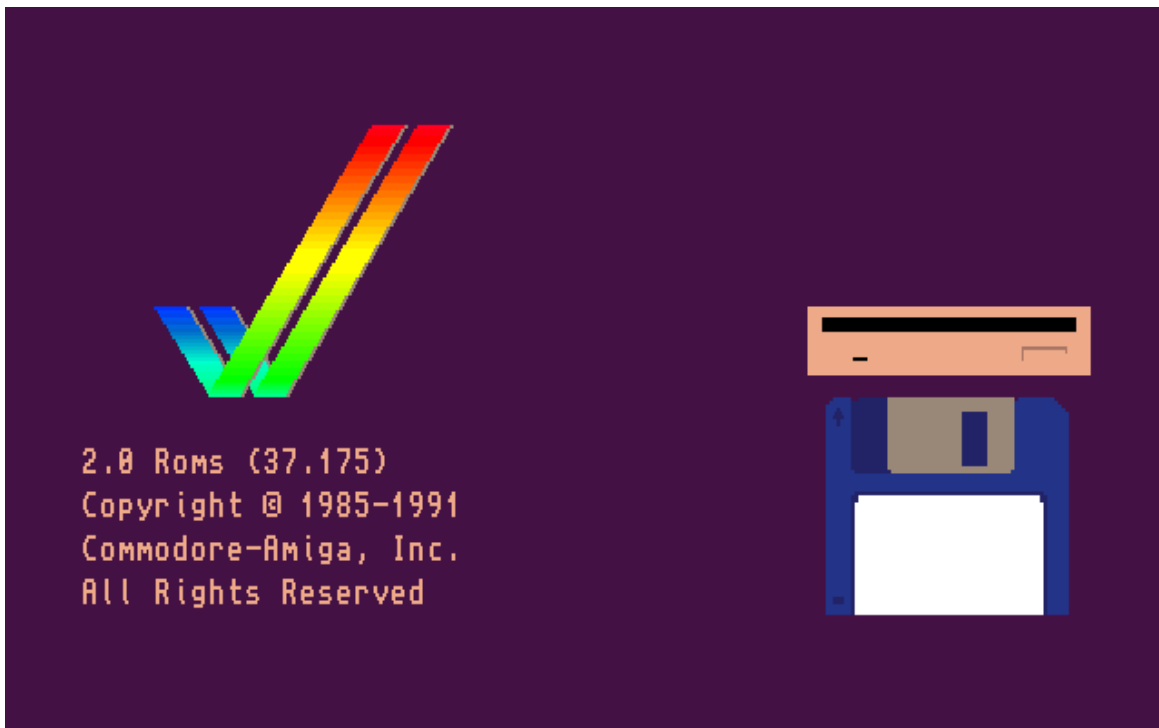
listened, our bouts always ending with him snapping the stick away from the base, leaving him with just the joy, which is ironic really since we could no longer play.



In the end, I got so sick of watching him break joystick after joystick after joystick and never learning a thing from the experience, as well as running the computer into the ground in every other respect, I decided to save up and buy an Amiga of my own, this time the later A600 model. This was aside from the fact that I could never get near 'his' Amiga to play on it unless we were grappling against each other at Wrestlemania.

He never did pay for his half of the computer, though I no longer cared because I had my new Amiga 600 and could use it whenever I wanted. It took me two years to save up enough pocket money to buy it, and from that day forth I promised my beloved Miggy that I'd never let the evil cretin near it and we lived happily ever after. And that's the story of how I reclaimed

the lemon tree from those thieving Shelbyville scoundrels and returned it to its rightful home here in Springfield.



After that, there was no stopping me. I owned dozens of fantastic games because there were so few financial restraints to amassing an enviable collection. If you couldn't afford to buy a premium £25 new release, wait six months and you could often get it for a tenner as a budget re-release. Demos and even complete games were delivered via magazine cover disks. Then there were cheap second-hand bargains to be scavenged at car boot sales, listed in Loot or your local newspaper's classifieds section. If you had Amiga-owning friends, their games were yours and vice-versa. Your hoard grew overnight and there was never a dull moment whether or not you had friends to compete against or cooperate with. Some of the best Amiga games were designed to be played in mutual support of one another to achieve common goals. Anyone remember Chaos Engine for instance? Warwick Davis certainly does...

What is your favourite game ever, and for what reason?

That really is difficult. There's been so many. I did used to love the Amiga back in the 1990s, and I'd get everything the Bitmap Brothers would do. So I'd have to say something like The Chaos Engine, which I really love, or there's Speedball. And, of course, there's Pocket Warwick.

MCV Develop interview (16th November 2012)

Value for money was a concept some of the console kids, no matter how hard they strained their grey matter, couldn't quite grasp. They'd smugly claim to have saved £300 by buying a console rather than a computer, completely failing to factor into this equation the £50 a pop price of the game cartridges. If they were lucky, they'd be gifted maybe one game for Christmas and another for their birthday, and still believed they were better off because they possessed *drum roll* Sonic the Hedgehog or *fanfare of trumpets* the sacred Italian plumber. Whilst we were swamped with a glut of games spanning all genres, they were left to wring every last drop of enjoyment out of the single title delivered with the console itself, which, lavished with so much attention would soon be completed.

Console games are child's play to emulate on modern PCs mainly because they were designed for units with identical specifications; the emulators only have to make provisions for a single configuration. In contrast, computer emulators require much more tweaking ...and frustration and monitor-pounding. Hence the existence of this guide; my attempt to help flatten the learning curve for you.

The Amiga was the last computer I owned imbued with genuine personality and charisma prior to switching to the DOS world in the mid-nineties. It was also the first computer I revisited via the art of emulation. It was light-years ahead of its time and the competition, spawning some of the most innovative, quirky and exciting games ever released. Nothing in the world, past or present can compare (shush, I don't want to hear any counter-arguments! :D). The Amiga delineated the era of the bedroom programmer who would spend countless hours lovingly crafting

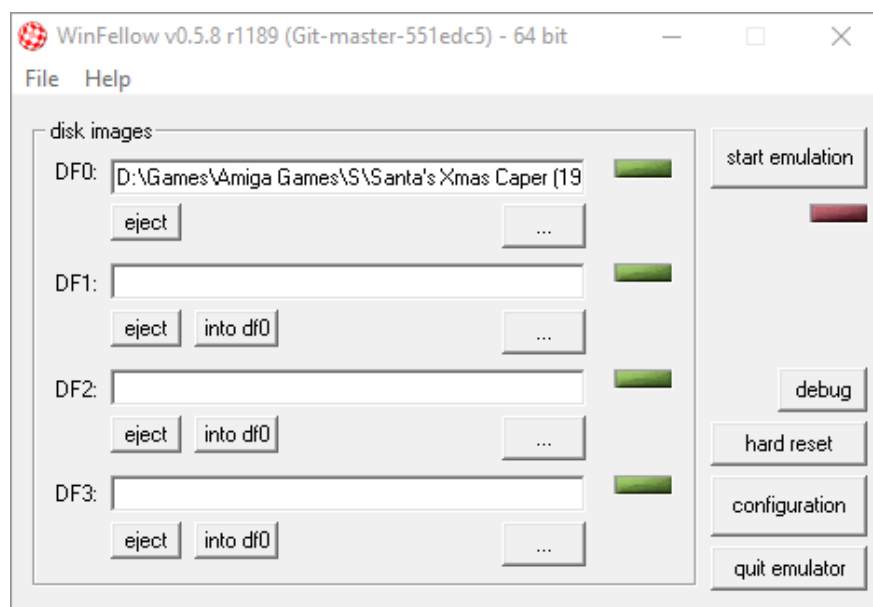
games that were fun to play rather than just pretty to look at. It's the basis upon which the PD (public domain) scene was founded. Back then plenty of *commercial* games developers *also* had their priorities in order; they didn't care about creating games that would appeal to the lowest common denominator audience, hence shifting x thousand units. Instead, they let their refreshingly off-beat imagination guide them, not punctilious marketing executives who knew zilch about the games industry.



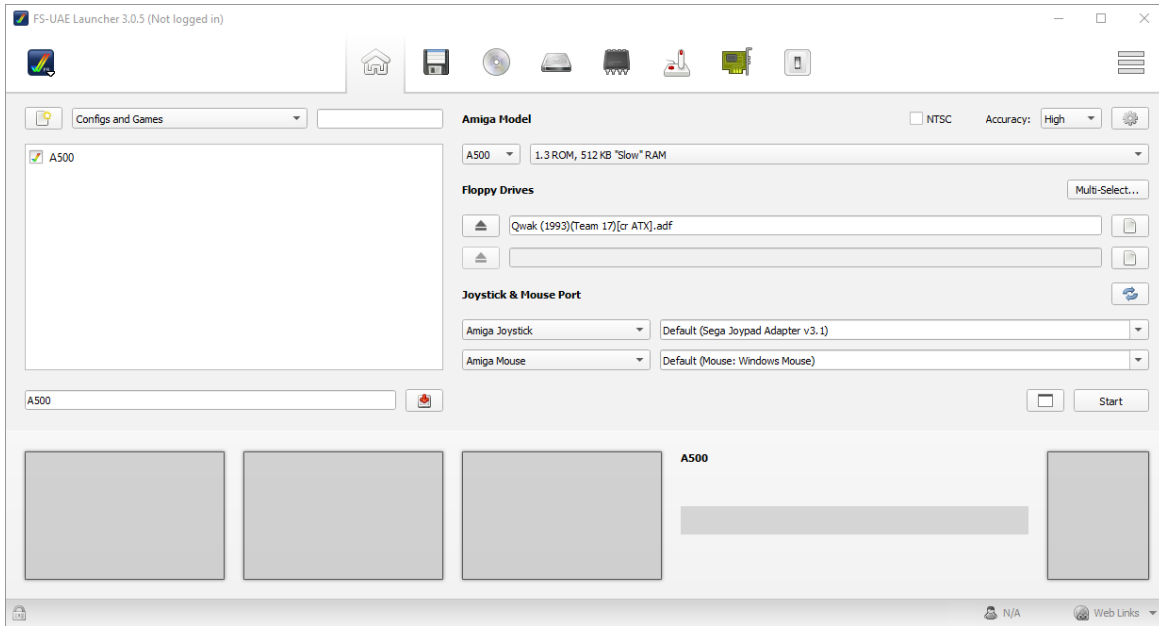
Sadly we've now reached a stage where many developers are content to continue churning out slight variations on archaic themes, contributing zero innovation to the industry. Most modern games are merely flashy, shallow drivel designed to pander to the whims of kids passing through one phase or another. It's all about half-heartedly knocking together games which will sell, rather than pioneering unique genres. Who gives a damn if the latest game pushes your NASA-specification PC to its utmost limits if it's tediously dull and totally lacking in gameplay? Now we have multinational corporations playing it safe producing sequel after sequel after sequel because they can be sure people will cling to whatever is familiar, irrespective of its

quality. Precisely why you should take a moment to step back in time to witness just how far wrong we've strayed. Cue the Amiga emulators!

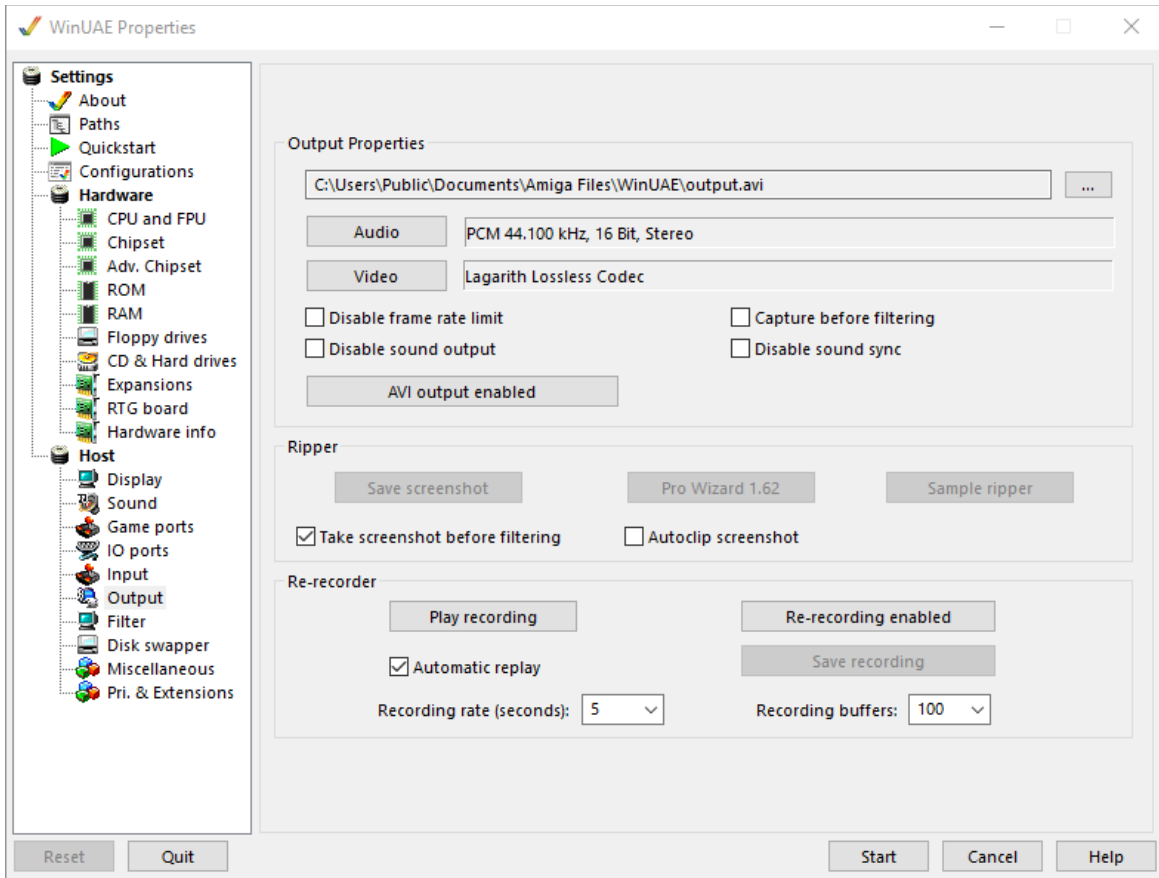
If we're honest, the rot set in *during* the Amiga era. It's not as though the platform wasn't also awash with carbon-copy clones devoid of inspirational creativity. You had to be selective in your gaming choices then, as we do now. The difference is that when the Amiga broke new ground, it quivered with terror. Now it just flinches a smidgeon before nonchalantly re-filling the tiny dent.



For all intents and purposes, there are only really two Amiga emulators worth considering for those of us seeking simple, reliable and free retro-gaming; WinUAE and FS-UAE. Winfellow is beautifully simple and streamlined, yet can't hope to compete in terms of compatibility and features. It's also severely hampered by being updated less frequently than the moon turns blue. A real shame since it will run on such lowly hardware, offering the most user-friendly interface of all.



FS-UAE executes upon a fork of WinUAE's codebase so shares the same extensive list of benefits. Where it truly excels is in its deviation from WinUAE's daunting interface. FS-UAE's presentation is far more approachable, intuitive and welcoming, especially for newbies returning to the Amiga platform for the first time in decades. Its arcade mode, for instance, hides all the nuts and bolts, promoting nostalgic immersion over continual tinkering. FS-UAE further enhances the user experience by automatically cataloguing and furnishing game collections with peripheral artwork and information by sourcing data from an ever-evolving online database. This online interaction even extends to providing support for head to head online play out of the box. A feat few classic Amiga gamers would have experienced back in the '90s.



For me, the main advantage WinUAE offers is its ability to capture immaculate quality video with the click of a button and the right codec installed. Try the Lagarith lossless codec which outputs in avi format and then compress as necessary in post-production. In contrast, FS-UAE totally ignores YouTubers looking for an easy way to record gameplay footage. Instead, you'll need to engage third-party software which may not fully cooperate with the emulator. That said, FS-UAE offers cross-platform compatibility, whereas WinUAE - as the name implies - is purely Windows-based software.

What you'll receive with Cloanto's commercial emulator, Amiga Forever, are just repackaged versions of the 100% free WinUAE/Winfellow software, encased in a pretty wrapper with a price tag where the cherry should be. Oh, and a completely unnecessary, proprietary file system known as RP9. Somehow it's all above board and perfectly legal, just highly dubious *morally*. How they've got the audacity to try and pull the wool over

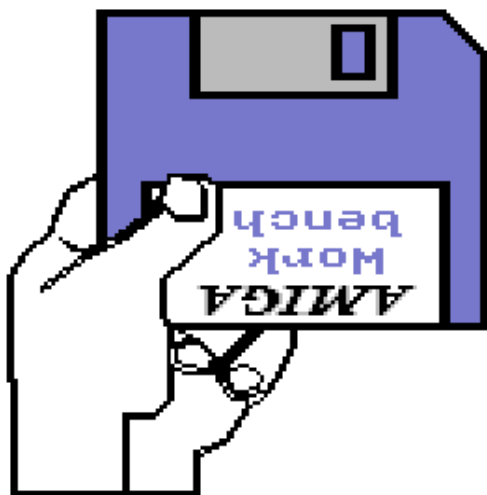
people's eyes is beyond me. Nevertheless, Amiga Forever *does* come equipped with legally licensed Kickstart ROMs and the Workbench operating system so is the ideal solution for anyone wanting to play old Amiga games without breaking the law. For those of us who realise that the original authors of the OS won't see a penny of the profits regardless, the latest builds of FS-UAE and WinUAE can be downloaded directly from the home page of their respective authors, to be accompanied by not-so-legal Kickstart ROMs.

Amithlon isn't an emulator per se, therefore won't be of any benefit whatsoever in terms of playing the Amiga game images you will be downloading shortly. Rather than re-creating an Amiga setup within Windows, Linux or whatever, Amithlon entirely replaces your operating system with AmigaOS, effectively transforming your PC into a real Amiga in lieu of adding an extra compatibility layer and resource bottleneck.

If you found yourself struggling to setup the Amiga OS all those years ago when you owned the genuine article, or are completely new to this, Amiga in a Box is a useful gadget you may wish to equip yourself with. Again, it's not exactly an emulator, rather a ready-made, optimally configured incarnation of the Amiga OS designed to be used in conjunction with WinUAE. Amiga in a Box is free to download, just add Kickstart and you're ready to rumble.

As you would expect, it's not a necessity to own any original Amiga games to be able to play them on your PC. All the best games have, over the years, been converted into ADF (Amiga disk format) images and uploaded to the internet to be shared and cherished in a lovey-dovey hippie kind of way. Aww, doesn't that make you feel warm and fuzzy all over? Likewise, if you're searching for Amiga ROMs, you need look no further than Emu Paradise or Planet Emu. These two monolithic wonders alone contain what must be 90-something per cent of the software ever released for the Amiga. More games than you'll ever have time to play in your lifetime, that's for sure!

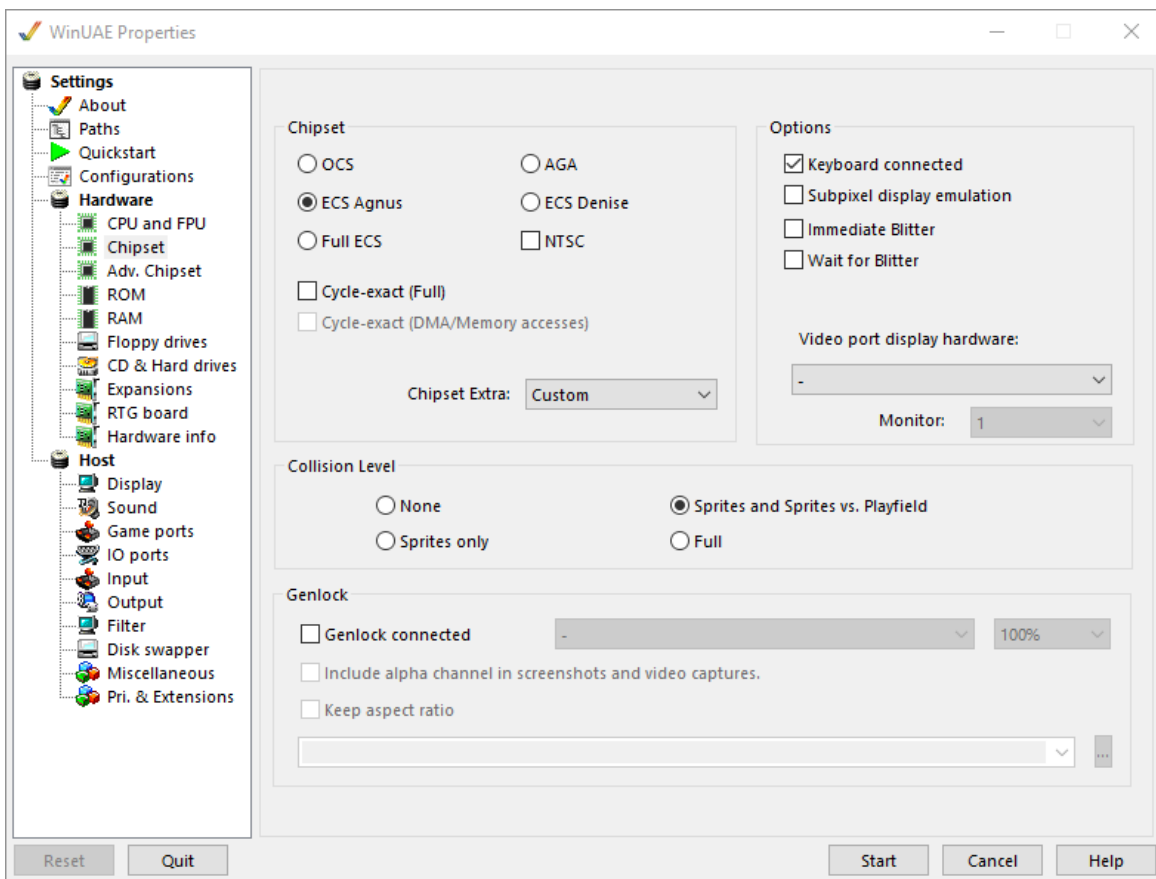
You can't simply load these floppy images into your emulator and expect them to work 'out of the box' like you would with a console emulator because, like PCs, they require bootstrap firmware to serve as a launchpad of sorts. Kickstart initialises the Amiga hardware, preparing it to accept bootable media, in this case. Surely you hadn't forgotten the Amiga's iconic floppy-inserting hand that welcomed you each time you switched on your beloved Miggy? Face-palm! You really *do* need a refresher course, don't you?



Kickstart ROMs constitute single files with a .rom extension and can be found online by anyone who has heard of Google. Strangely enough, it's still illegal to download and distribute these files, solely because the copyright-squatting vultures over at Cloanto say so. Believe it or not, Kickstart ROMs, to this day, still change hands for real, actual cash so they are reluctant to give up this nice little earner. Big meanies the lot of them! Pffft, you might say (and you'd be right!), yet don't let this put you off. These digital delights are no doubt out there, which is great news considering you can't do a damn thing without them.

WinUAE is blessed with a plethora of tweakable options, an impressive compatibility record, and capacity for an infinite number of save states/virtual Amiga configurations. As is the easier to navigate FS-UAE which will also automatically download

and implement the perfect array of simulated hardware/software for any given game to ensure effortless execution. Both emulators demand reasonably high-specification systems to operate smoothly. Skimp on the hardware and they will inevitably chug along delivering a stuttering, glitchy experience. If your system really isn't up to the task, there's always Winfellow to fall back on, assuming its limited scope suits your criteria.

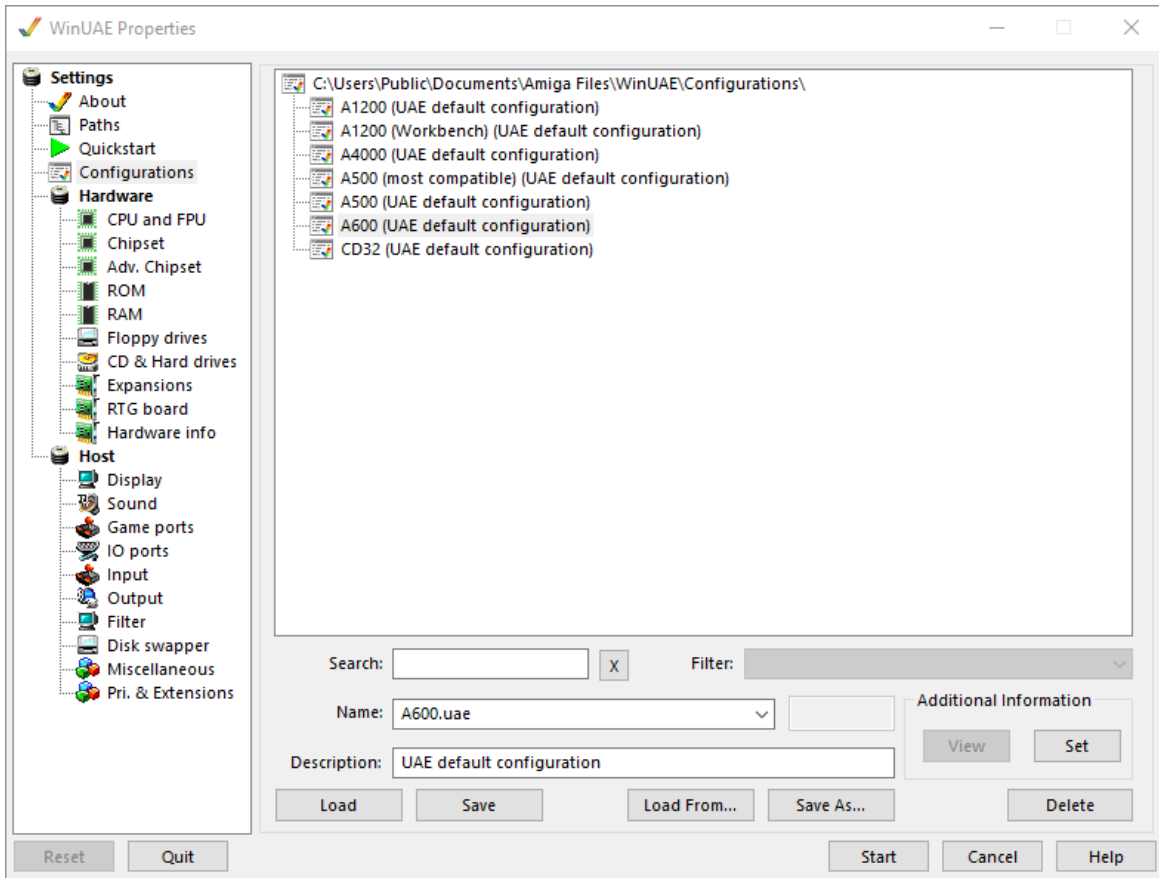


Amiga emulators operate by recreating every aspect of a real Amiga, encompassing all the various RAM, chipset and processor configurations that comprise the different models (the Amiga 500, 500+, 600, 1200, 3000, 4000 etc). In effect, you're not running an Amiga game directly via PC hardware, rather courtesy of a virtual Amiga at the speed of the genuine article. Virtual Amigas can be accelerated by adding RAM or upgrading the processor, though this can lead to compatibility problems if the games weren't originally designed to recognise such expanded

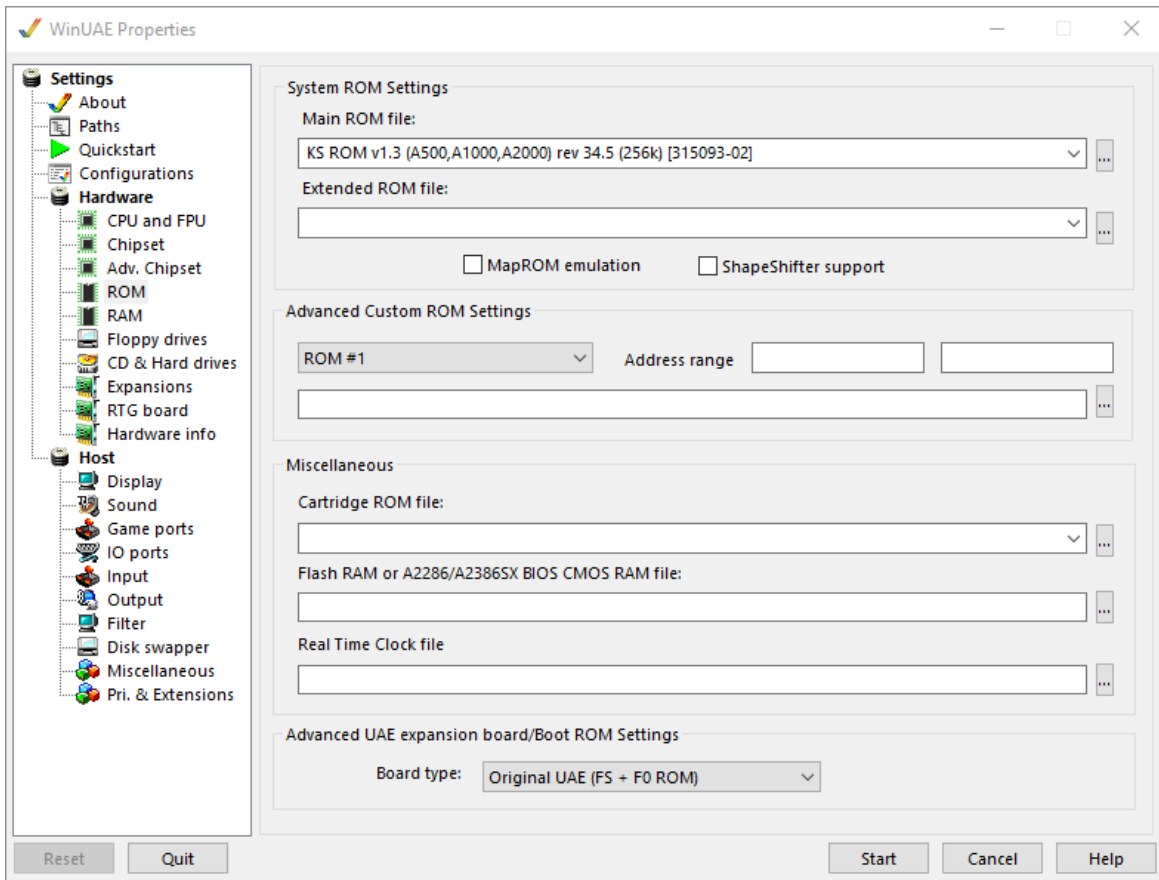
kit, as was the case with the vast majority of classic Amiga games.

Analogous to PC games, Amiga varieties require certain minimum specifications to run. Some games only work with Kickstart version 1.3 (mostly older games designed for the 500 or 500+), while others will require later versions such as 2.04 or 3.1 (2.04 is the default arrangement for the Amiga 600, whereas 3.1 came shipped with the Amiga 1200). Then there are a smorgasbord of processor and memory configurations to tweak. WinUAE/FS-UAE can competently simulate all Amiga models, enhanced with an endless combination of upgrades. The tricky part is figuring out which configuration is required by which game and bringing the two entities into harmonious alignment. Alternatively, KISS - let FS-UAE decide for you. This may partly explain why 'Back to the Roots' is no longer around.

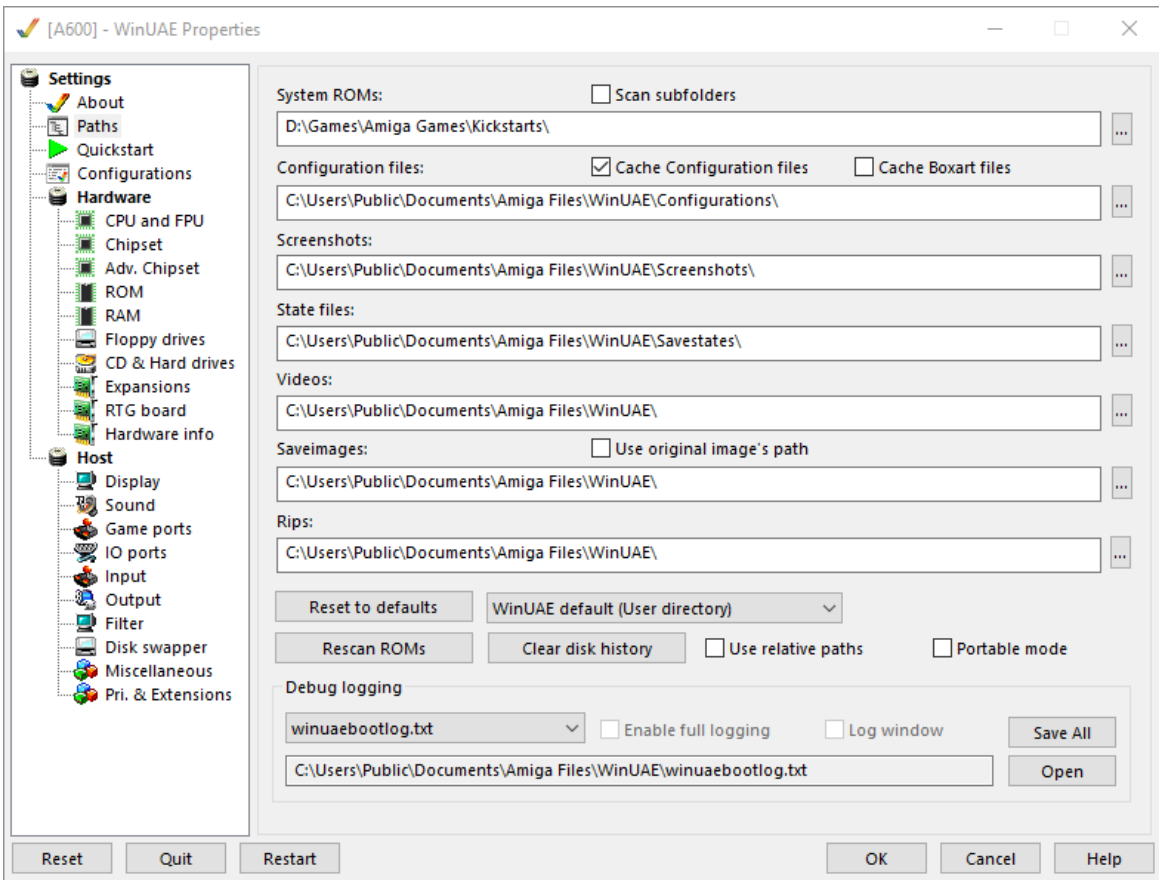
WinUAE users may like to take care of this themselves for old time's sake by means of trial and error, or to borrow a pre-configured setup that is known to work with a particular game. Both emulators provide extensive support for multiple configurations and also come equipped with default systems to simulate each model, offering a head-start when returning to the drawing board. There's no longer any need to overwrite or rename the original .uae configuration file. Instead, save all your virtual Amigas to disk and load them into the emulator as and when they are required. As long as they adopt unique filenames, they can happily live alongside one another in the same folder.

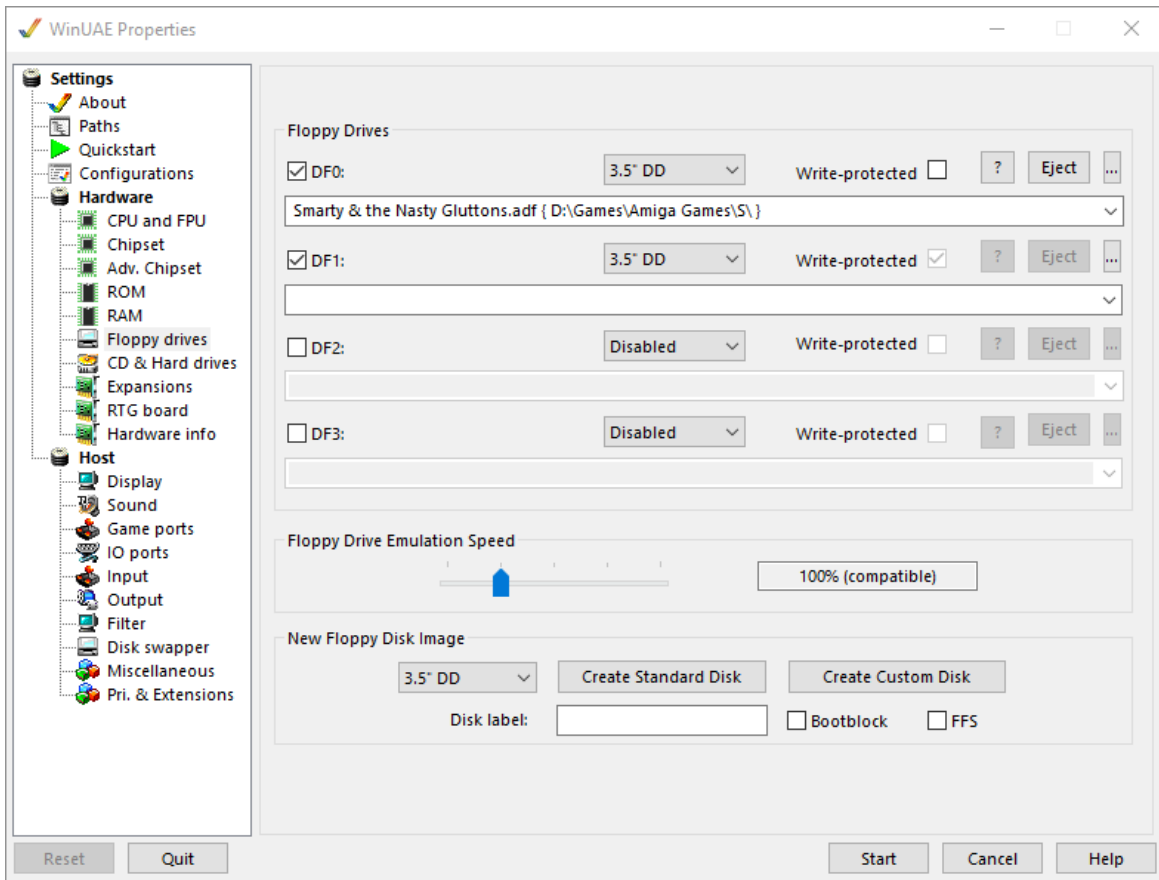


Let's see if we can put all this theory into practice to get your first Amiga-emulated game up and running. Download, install and run your chosen emulator and its front-end (or GUI if you prefer) should now be glaring back at you waiting for input.



Before the emulator can load ADF files, we are required to let it know where our Kickstart ROM is stored. In WinUAE's case, these details are lodged under the ROM menu. From the same area it's also possible to select an 'extended' ROM should you wish to emulate a CDTV or CD32 system. To instruct WinUAE to always search for ROMs in a specific location, you can set defaults via the path menu.



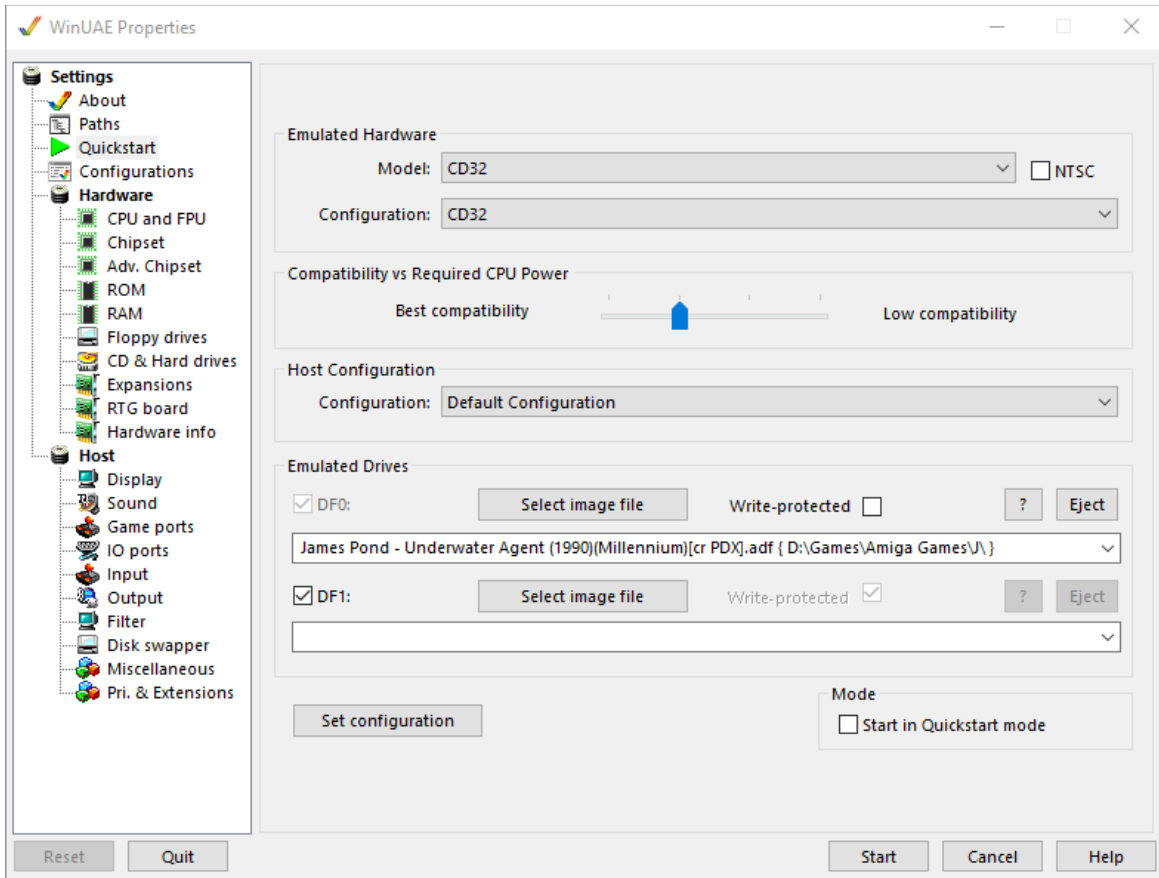


With that essential task taken care of, it's time to switch to the floppy drives menu from which you can begin populating the slots. Here you will see four dialogue boxes labelled DF0, DF1, DF2 and finally DF3. These are virtual floppy drives into which you 'insert' ADF files in order to boot them. If you wanted to play a one-disk game, you would click on the button labelled with three horizontal dots next to the first drive (DF0) to open up an explorer window, locate the game file and double-click on it to insert it into the drive.



Assuming you have already configured WinUAE to match the game's requirements, now all you have to do to load the game is click on the 'start' button. To switch back to the GUI from within a game, you would press the F12 key. Should you wish to load a different game, you would press the 'reset' button, eject the disk from the drive and insert a new one.

Multi-disk games can be loaded by inserting the disks (ADF files) into the drives sequentially until each slot is occupied. Whenever a disk change is necessary, the emulator will automatically attempt to read the ADF in the subsequent drive. Should it fail to locate the next disk in the series because the game wasn't programmed to recognise multiple drives, we're forced to revert back to old school, poverty-stricken methods. Under these circumstances, we're obliged to eject disk 1 from drive DF0, replacing it with disk 2 or whichever disk has been requested. Sometimes disabling the drives not currently in use by unticking the relevant boxes can assist in resolving compatibility issues. Leaving the 'floppy drive emulation speed' slider at the default setting too is most likely to achieve the equivalent outcome.



Up until now, I've deliberately been vague regarding the more intricate configuration options. This is partly because you need not concern yourself with them if planning to use the ready-made, default configuration files, and partly because the majority of the tweaks are mutual to both emulators, hence explaining their relevance twice would be of little use. For this reason, we will consider them collectively below.

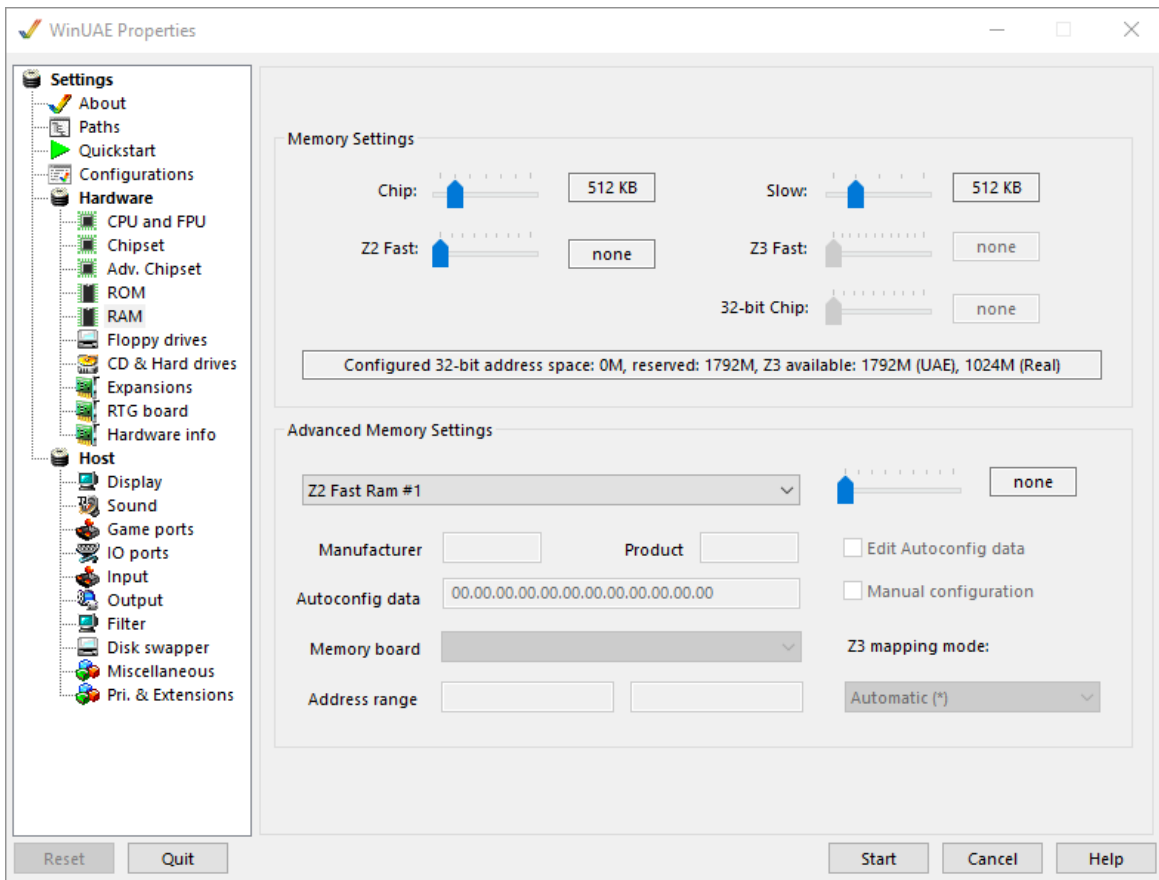
Positioning of these options in WinUAE and FS-UAE will differ slightly, while the fundamental principles remain identical. By randomly prodding buttons within the configuration menus of these emulators, you'll get there in the end, though wouldn't you rather understand the technical specifications of the computers you are attempting to emulate?



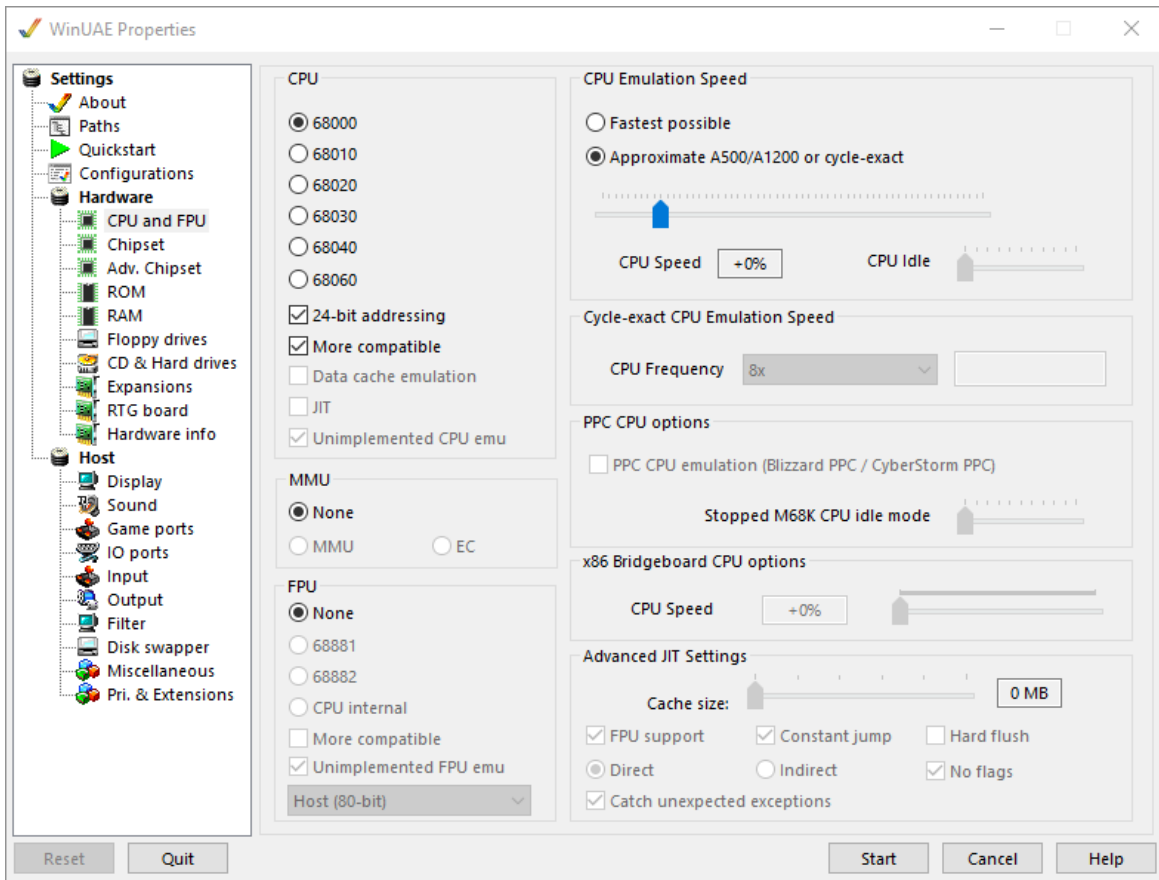
The 'Amiga models and variants' tables found on [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amiga_models_and_variants) list these blueprints in an easy to read format, therefore can be employed as a guide to tweaking WinUAE or FS-UAE. By way of example, should you wish to run Flood, start by establishing which year the game was made (1990 in this case). Then refer to Wikipedia's tables to discover which models were available at the time and the producers (Bullfrog in this case) would have had in mind when they designed it. This would most likely be the A500 or A500+, so by my reckoning, you'd have a better chance of getting it to run by attempting to emulate one of these two setups. It's possible Flood will also run on the more recent Amiga systems without having to downgrade with Relokick, of course. Nevertheless, this is generally a good rule of thumb should you experience difficulties.

If you wish to run an AGA (advanced graphics architecture) game, you would consult the charts to see which models came equipped with AGA support and attempt to emulate this setup (either the A1200 or the A4000). Commodore's CD32 console also offers AGA support, although such games are not imaged using the usual ADF format so you're unlikely to get them

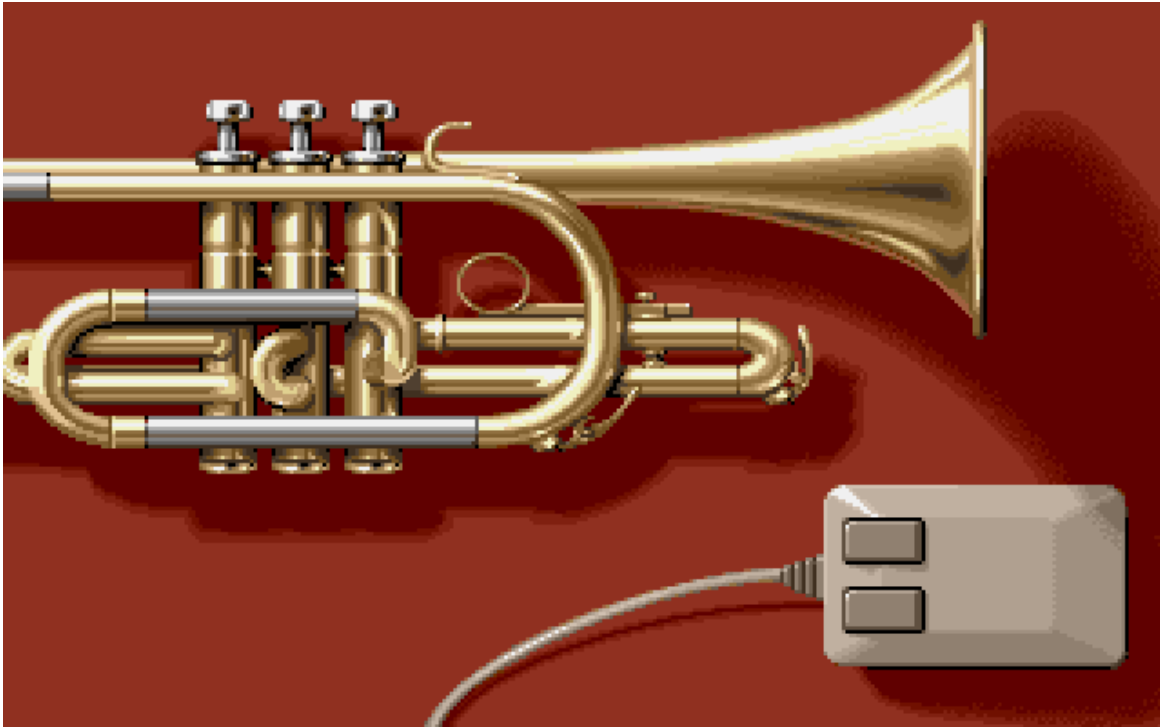
confused. These are less commonly available online compared to floppy images, though where found, will incorporate one of two flavours; BIN or ISO format.



Once you've successfully emulated your chosen model, you can try adding more RAM and boosting the clock speed etc. to improve performance. Obviously, if a game suddenly refuses to load, you should revert back to your last known working configuration to restore compatibility.



Should you discover that a game is running too fast, you might like to try taming it by reducing the CPU emulation speed. Alternatively, if it runs too *slowly*, practising the opposite will encourage the game to accelerate. In WinUAE, you could do so by reaching a compromise between CPU and chipset speed through nudging a slider back and forth between two extreme poles and switching between the various CPU clock speeds. Get it spot-on and you can break out your trumpet for another fanfare!



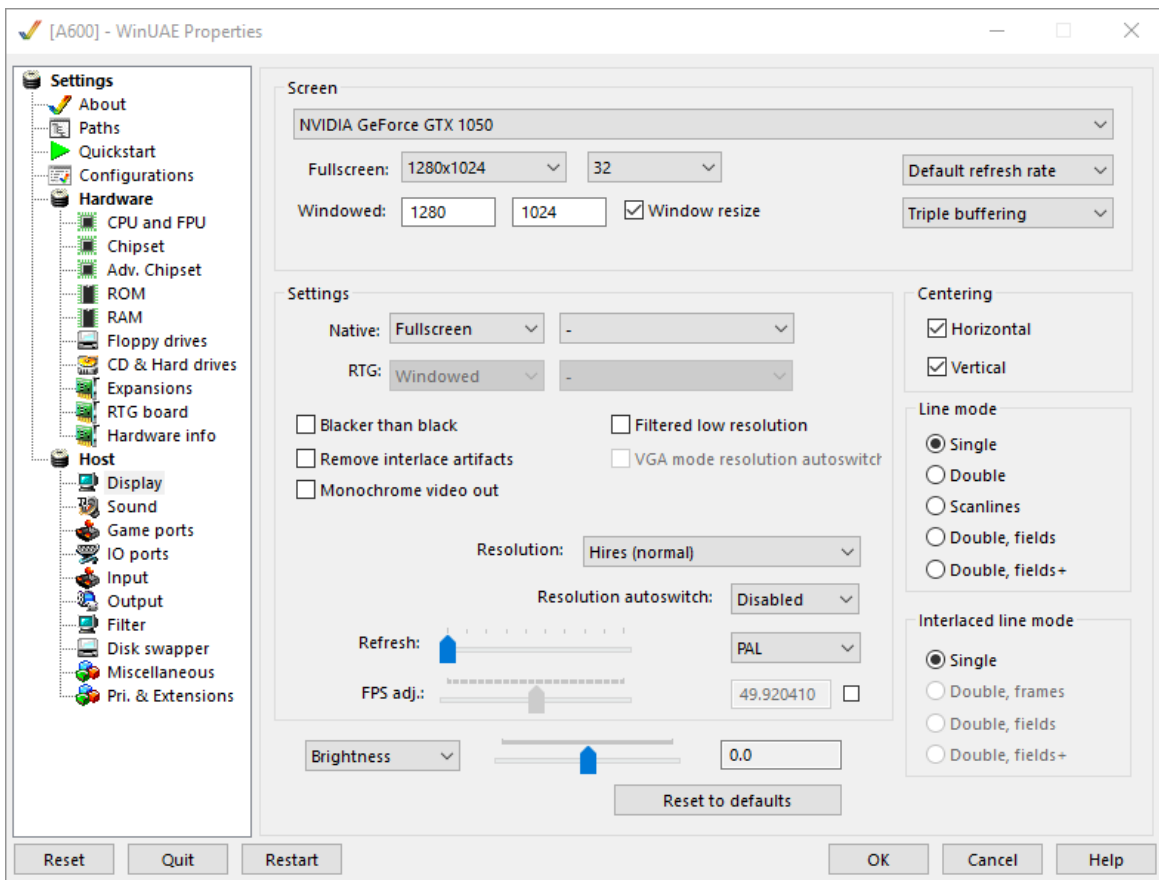
If you're planning to run WinUAE in full screen mode and don't mind stretching the resolution to occupy its entire width (what sacrilege!), I would *reluctantly* recommend choosing 'native' from the fullscreen drop-down menu. This will eliminate the need to switch resolutions when flipping between desktop and emulator environments, thereby minimising lag and rescaling. If you'd rather aim for a more authentic visual experience, you'd be best advised to choose a ratio closer to that of the Amiga display. If your native resolution is 1920 x 1080, for instance, you might like to try the 1280 x 1024 option to take maximum advantage of the vertical screen real estate without distorting the image through horizontal warping. In PAL mode, the classic Amiga operated at a resolution of 320 x 256 pixels. Multiply each figure neatly by four and you'll understand why 1280 x 1024 is logically the route to ocular harmony.

Go overboard with high resolution settings and you may experience a detrimental effect on performance, especially when running WinUAE on an older system lacking a dedicated graphics card. Consequently, sound can become distorted or dawdle far behind visuals. Surprisingly, the root of many sound problems

can be traced back to the way in which your display is configured, since overburdening a system reduces the resources available to other functions.

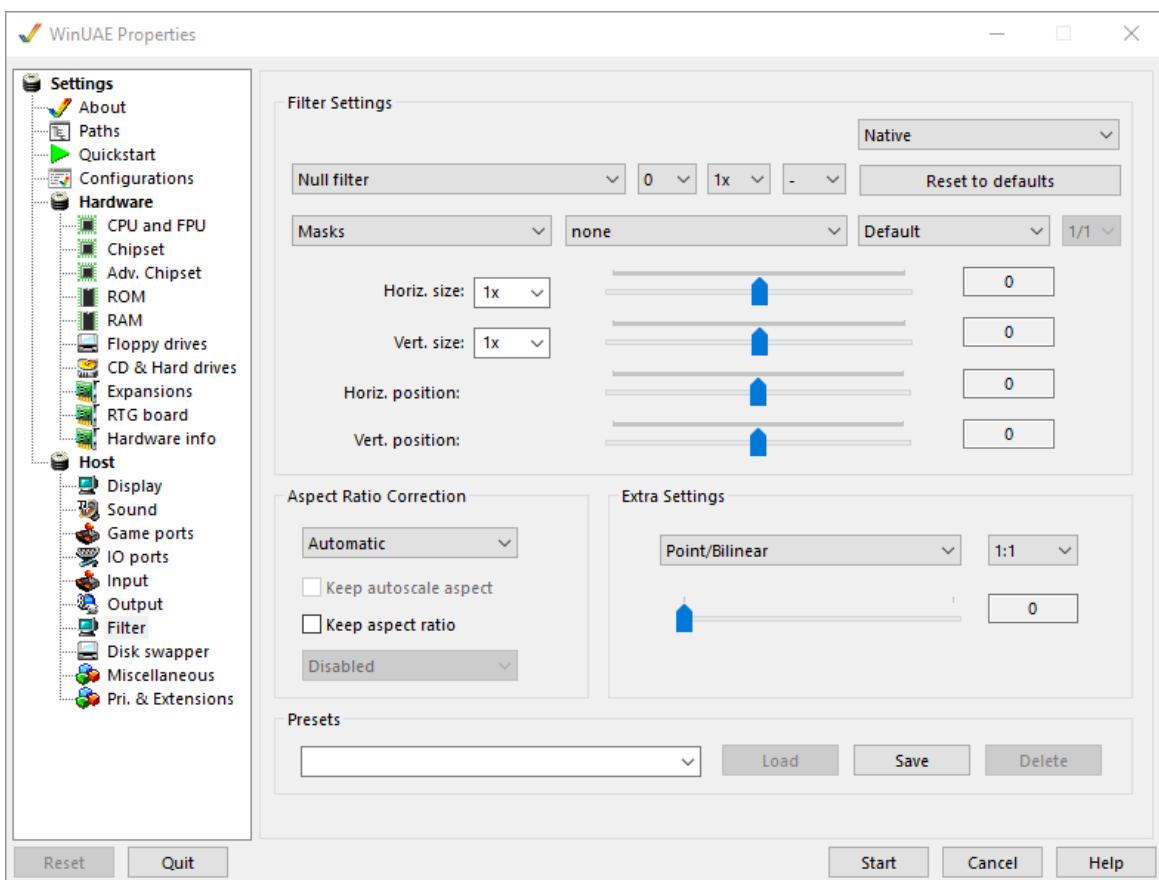
A further possibility is to run WinUAE at a vertically-close-to-native resolution in a window overlaying your desktop to entirely avoid all the screen-meddling malarkey. As long as the vertical plane is just shy of its maximum potential, nothing will be obscured beyond the scope of the display. If you can live with any distractions located to either side of the 5:4 ratio window, this is the ideal solution.

Personally, I wouldn't bother enabling scanlines as it can be quite tricky to reproduce an accurate replica of the effect engendered by old CRT TVs. Large, blocky pixels are preferable to ugly, malformed scanlines in my opinion.



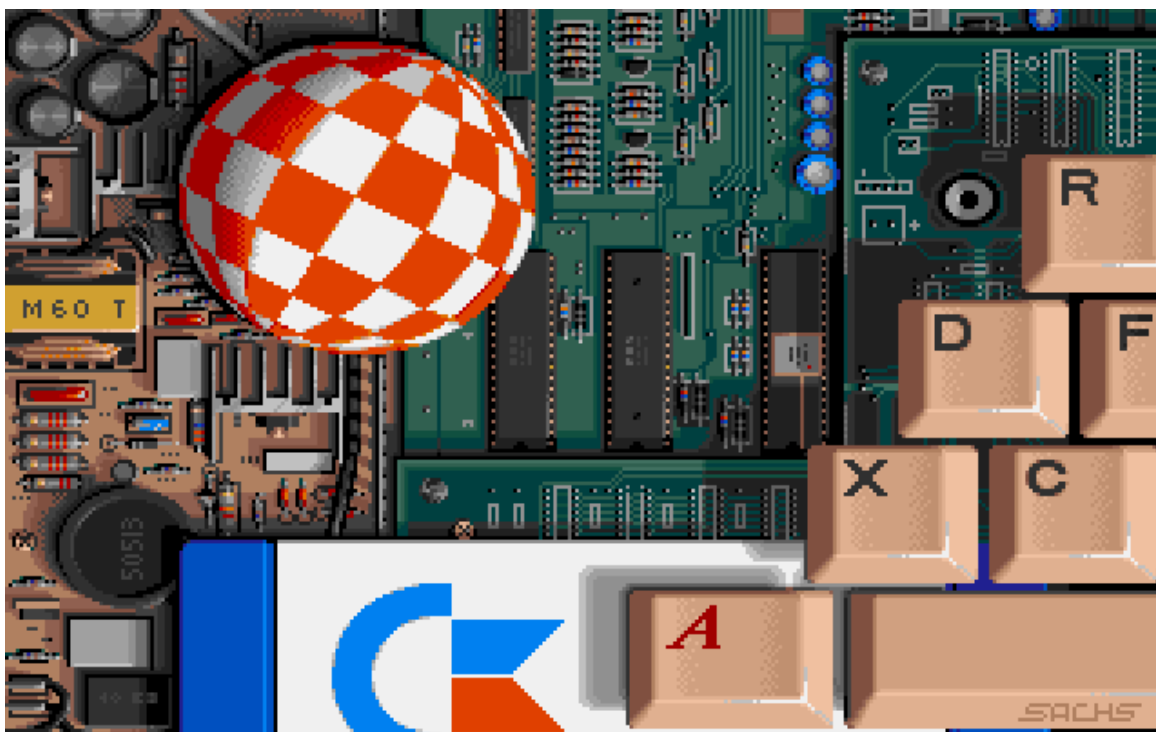
Another screen resolution feature worth tweaking is the display frequency (or refresh rate if you prefer). This should be adjusted so as to match the frequency settings of your typical desktop environment. Doing so minimises the requirement to adjust the physical screen dimensions of your monitor whenever 'booting' the emulator. Set this to the maximum range your monitor can output to avoid screen flicker, minimising eye strain.

Scanlines add a black line between each line of colour to simulate the aesthetics of an old TV screen, while 2x horizontal pixel scaling doubles the screen width to achieve equilibrium when used with the scanlines option. Note that the use of these options is a matter of personal preference, not necessity. You might detest scanlines.

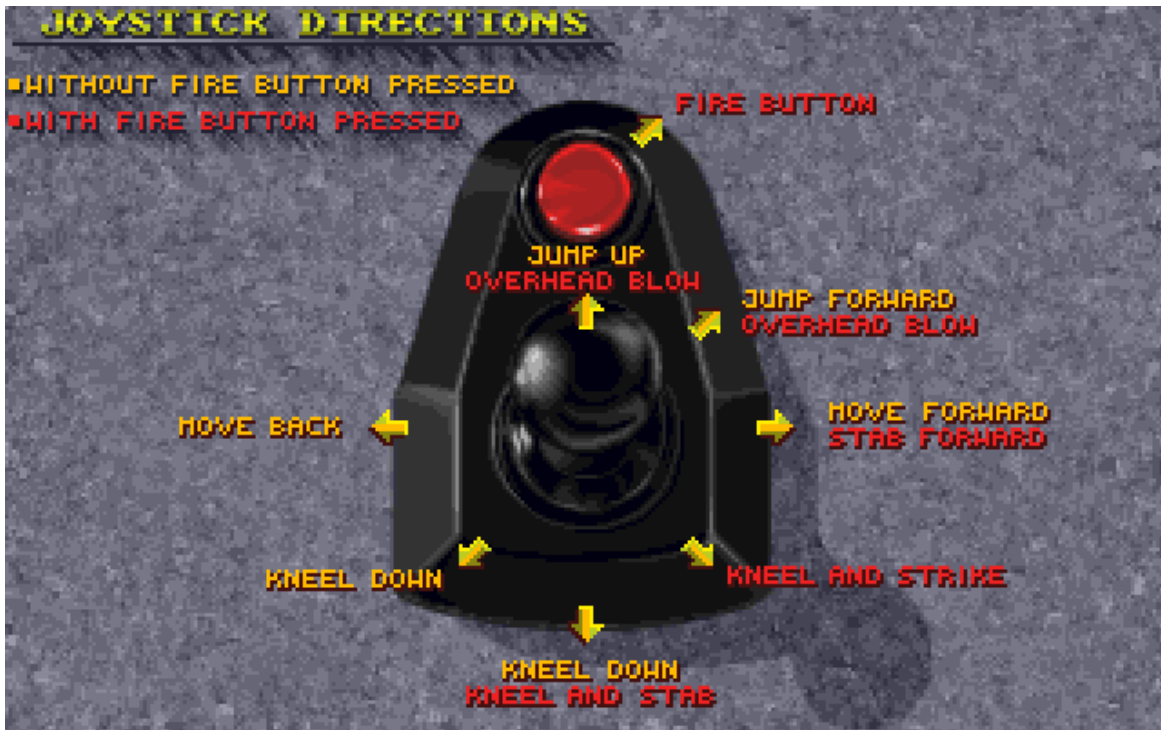


In WinUAE we also have the option to use the 'aspect ratio correction' (see the filter menu) or 'centering' feature to ensure that the screen isn't distorted or out of alignment. Even so, I've

come to discover that setting up display options in either emulator is far from an exact science owing to Amiga and PC screen resolutions/refresh rates not being directly equatable. Your mileage may vary.

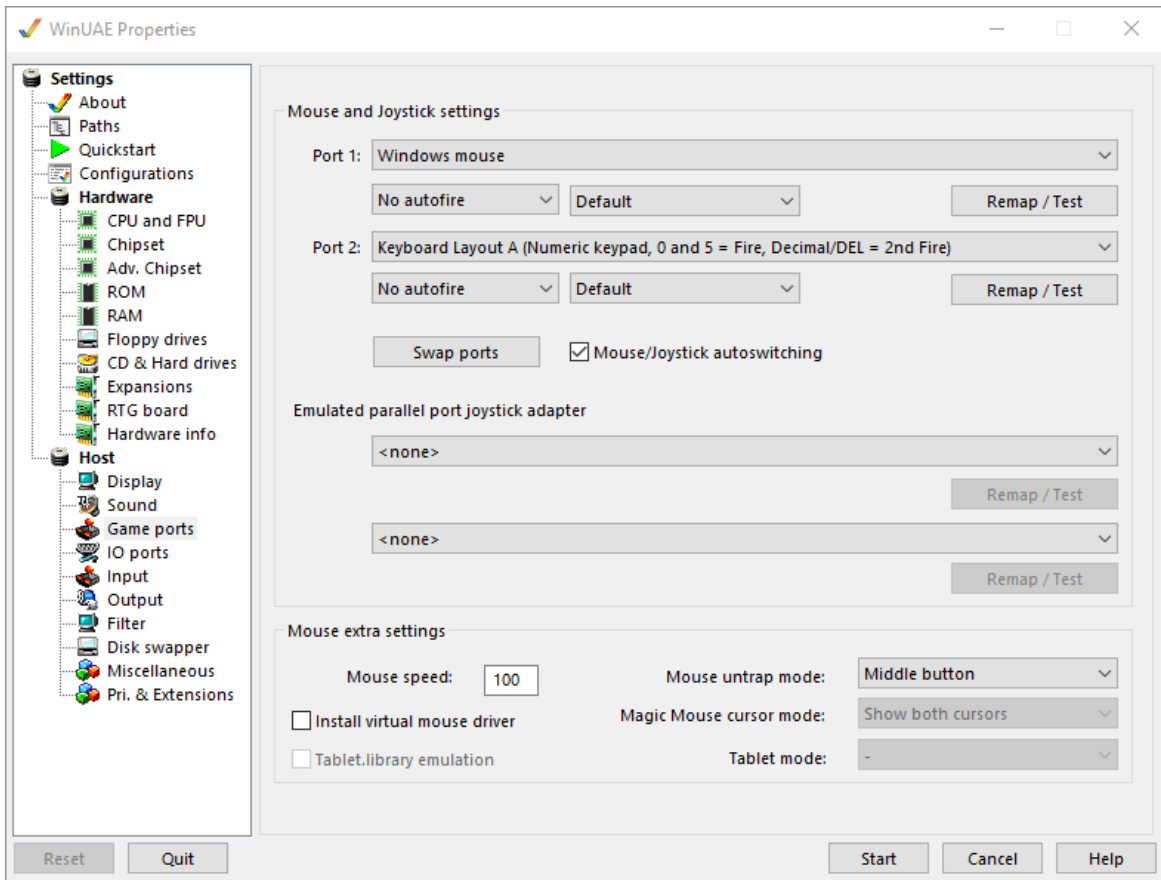


Perhaps the settings you'll be most interested in at this stage are the ones that define which keys you'd like to use. If you don't intend to employ a joystick or jypad, a number of different configurations are available to choose from.

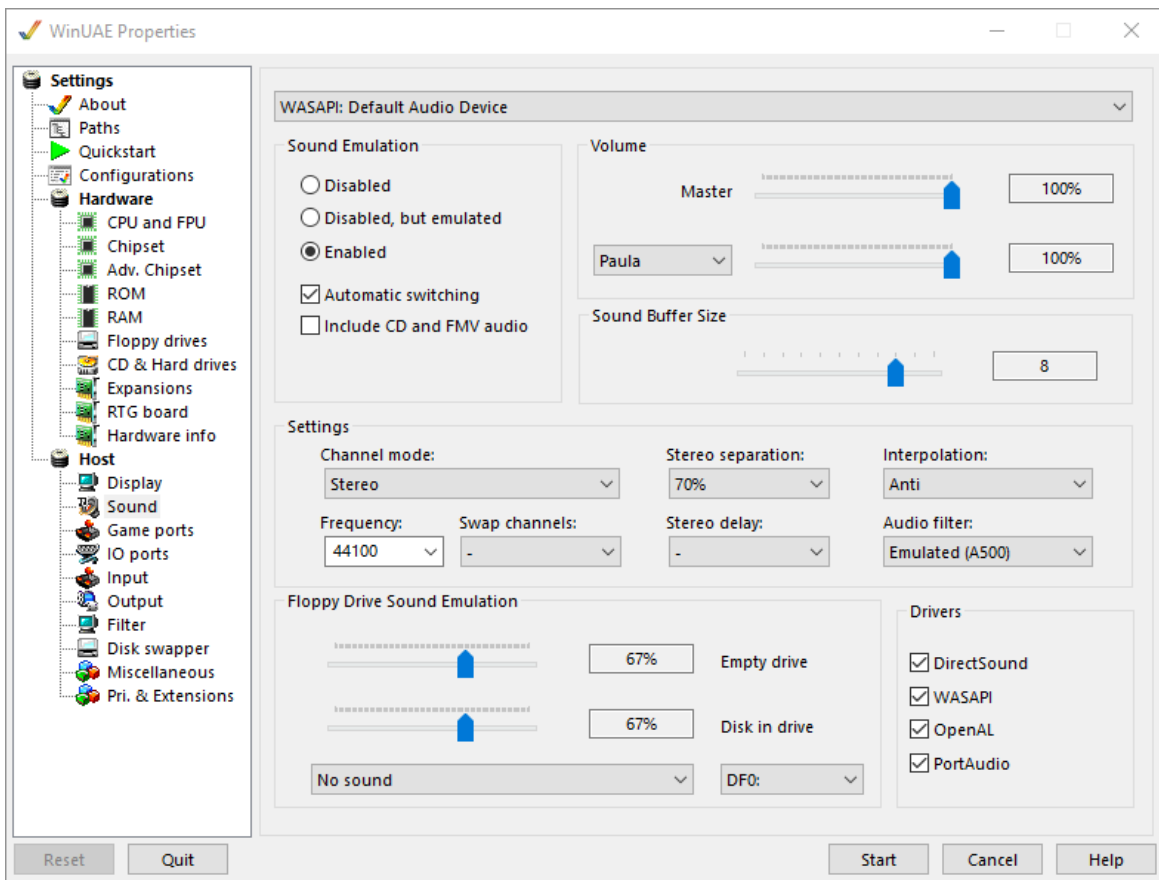


WinUAE, by default, offers *three* alternatives (the second fire key is very rarely used, which explains why WinUAE does not provide support for it prior to applying personal customisation). These are as follows:-

<u>WinUAE</u> <u>Keys</u>	<u>Config_A</u>	<u>Config_B</u>	<u>Config_C</u>
Up	Keypad 8	Up cursor	T
Down	Keypad 2	Down cursor	G
Left	Keypad 4	Left cursor	F
Right	Keypad 6	Right cursor	H
Fire 0	Keypad 0	Right control	Left alt
Fire 1			



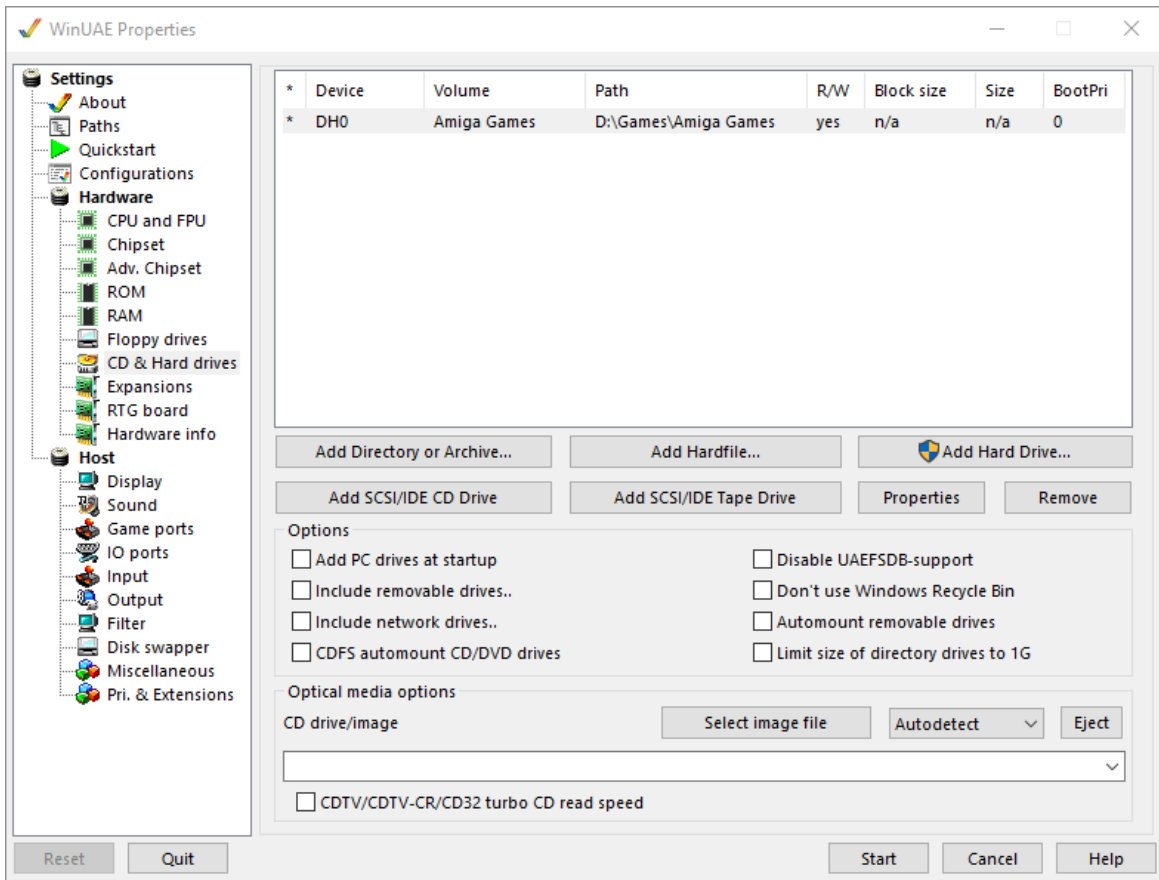
Under the sound tab, the majority of settings require little explanation and can, in any case, be left at the default values unless you experience difficulties. The sound buffer toggle provides the ability to increase the amount of system memory dedicated to processing sound information in the hope that by allocating more RAM, less stuttering will be in evidence. Again, a trade-off exists whereby improving quality in one field or another can reduce emulation speed.



Both emulators are capable of handling 'hard files', designed to emulate Amiga hard drives. This feature comes in very handy when intending to play multi-disk games without having to swap between them. Remember those monster LucasArts adventures?



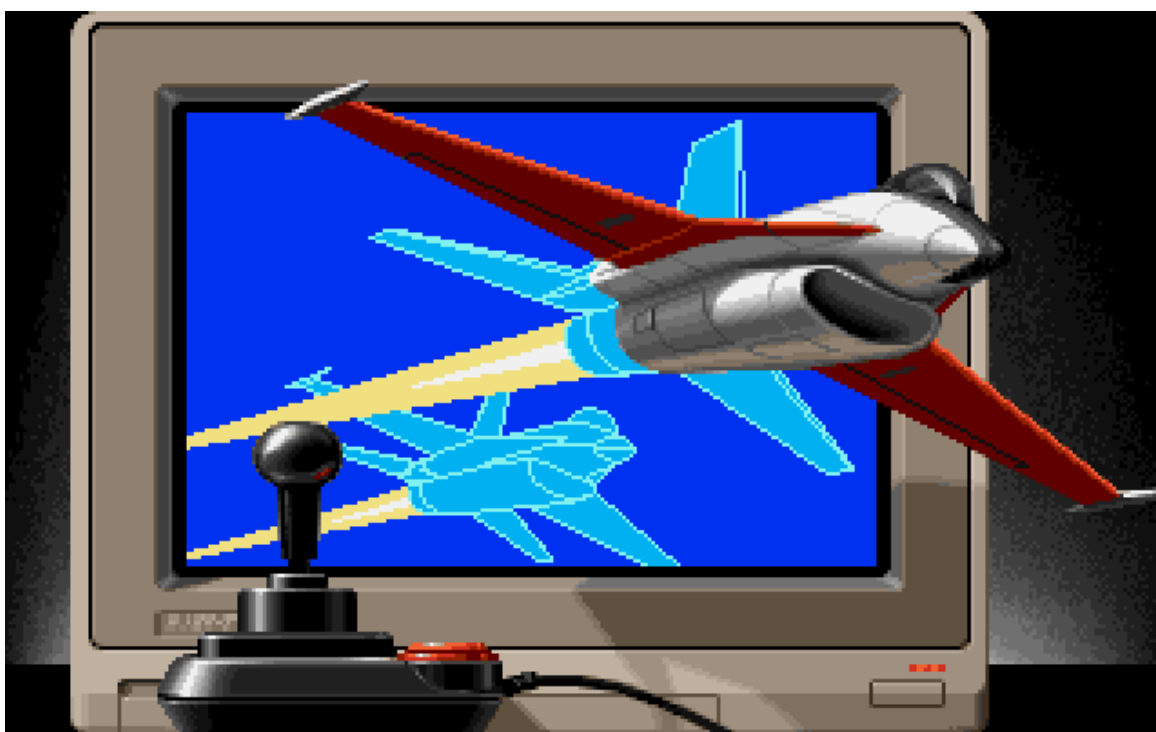
Further sweetening the deal, this will speed up anything else you might like to install to the virtual hard drive, regardless of the number of floppies it occupies. To capitalise on this feature, you would simply select 'create hard file', choose a name/place to store it, and inform WinUAE how much space you'd like it to occupy.



In WinUAE it's also possible to use a directory as a hard drive, which is more convenient as it doesn't have a limited capacity (the size of your real PC hard drive obviously setting the boundaries). If you plan to use your virtual Amiga solely for playing games, hard files are probably overkill seeing as most Amiga games came on fewer than four disks and so can easily be pre-loaded into the floppy drive slots to avoid disk-swapping. For this reason, you may want to skip this stage altogether.

What settings remain are fairly self-explanatory so I won't dwell on those. In any case, what works well on one PC won't necessarily work well on *a//* PCs, making recommendations somewhat redundant. Amiga emulation can be a bit hit or miss, demanding much patience to achieve accurate reproduction. Some games, of course, will remain unemulatable for the present (hey, it's my party and I'll neologise if I want to!), though since there's always a new release of WinUAE on the horizon, whipping

them into shape to cooperate in the future is not totally out of reach.



I'm going to button it now while you trundle off and reacquaint yourself with some of the greatest games ever produced. To which other format could you possibly look with this in mind? Go on, I'll still be here when you get back, I can amuse myself. I'll just sit here twiddling my thumbs, don't you worry about me. Are you still here? Shoo!

Ah, there you are. I thought you'd *never* return. Get a little carried away did we? So what do you think? They take some beating even now don't they? It's just a shame that to find gameplay of this calibre nowadays you have to delve into the dim and distant past. How did it all go so horribly wrong? Personally, I think the exponential and unrelenting development of technology had a lot to do with it. Before the boundaries of the current hardware had been fully explored, the next big thing was pushed onto the market and people simply *had* to have it whether this entailed faster processors, extra RAM or more sophisticated graphics cards.

Rather than concentrating on researching and designing new and original titles, games developers were set the goal of producing those that would fully utilise this new technology. When much greater emphasis was placed on flashy albeit ultimately shallow graphics and special effects, a steady decline of interest in the 'fun factor' ensued.

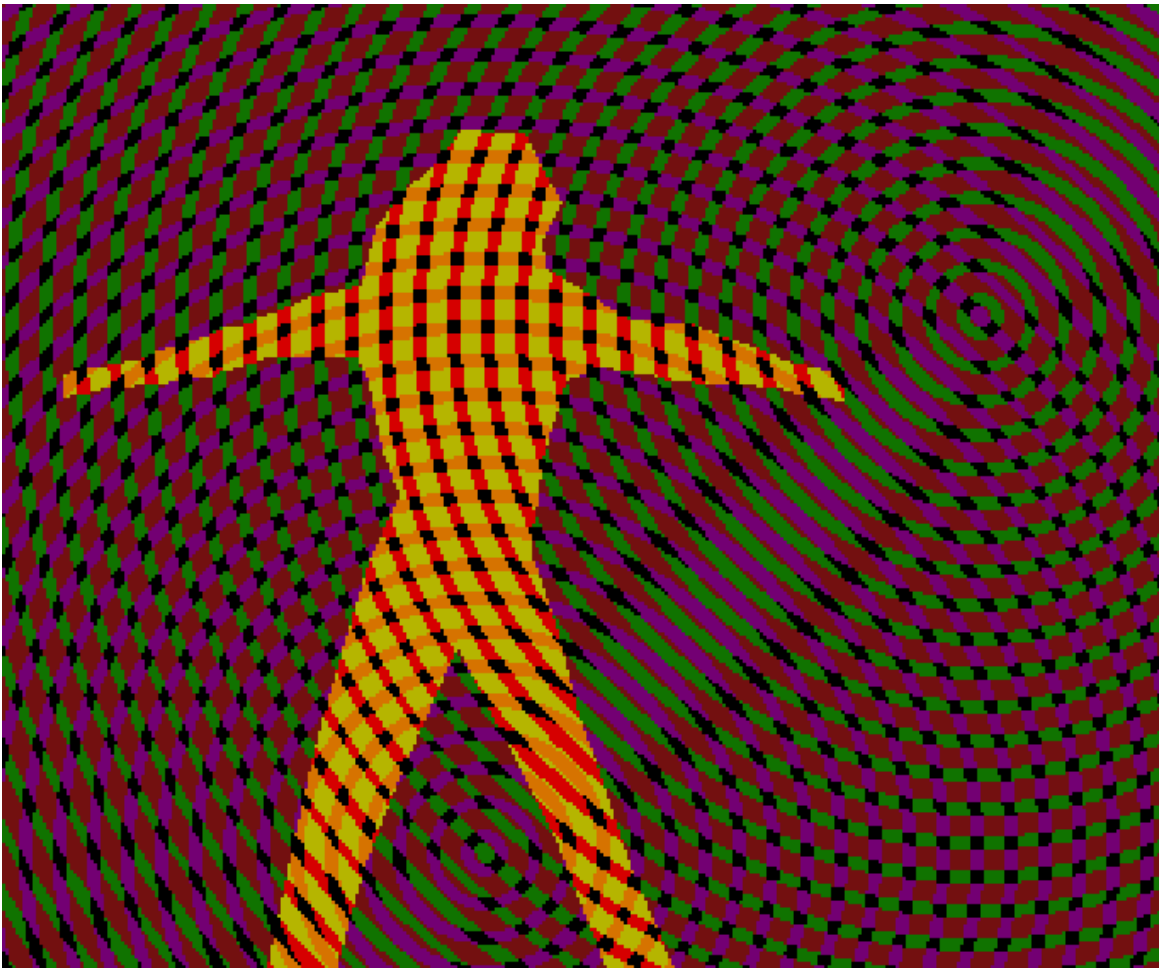
Can you recall the brief era when cinegames were all the rage? Our jaws dropped in amazement when we first witnessed the awe-inspiring visuals in magazines. When we *played* them, however, we realised there was almost zero interaction on offer and the emperor's new clothes soon slipped to the ground, leaving them naked and embarrassed. They're soulless, empty vessels that give the impression you're watching a movie rather than playing a game. This would be fine if they turned out to be *respectable* movies, except clearly they're not because it simply wasn't feasible to compete with the silver screen and that shouldn't have been their *raison d'etre*. They're the gaming equivalent of grade C horror flicks, or even worse, straight to video releases.

The final nail in the coffin arrived with the advent of 3D graphics cards, I believe. I'm not saying that all 3D games are terrible or that 3D graphics cards are totally to blame, just that they shifted the goalposts, warping computer games beyond recognition. There *has* been the odd blip in the lifeless pulse of modern gaming, though sadly these minor tremors are the exception rather than the rule. Alone they aren't enough to resuscitate the industry for those of us who grew up during the golden era when gameplay was king.

It has been demonstrated time and again that it *is* possible to create ground-breaking games without resorting to exploiting the latest video card technology. 3D graphics cards should have added an extra dimension, erm, *literally*, to games, offering new foundations on which to build, whilst maintaining the quality and playability of the 2D games of yesteryear. What happened in reality, however, was a far cry from progress; all the emergence of 3D cards has managed to achieve is an unyielding flow of

mediocre titles, the production of which induced by waving the wrong carrot on a stick before the noses of game developers.

These days it's hardware manufacturers who call the shots, games developers working for the giant multinationals are merely obedient puppets forced into a Procrustean bed of ad infinitum repetition. Whenever a new, all-singing, all-dancing graphics card is released, there's a frantic rush to create games that will push the technology to its limits with the aim of producing demos to showcase this latest kit. When I say 'demos' I mean it in the original sense of the word as used in 'demo' scene culture, not cut-down game tasters or trailers.



There's far too much back-scratching going on for my liking. It's as though games publishers and hardware manufacturers are in league with one another. Hardware manufacturers fulfil their part

of the bargain by churning out the latest, greatest kit, the gaming branch of the same clandestine organisation then responds by producing games which require - *demand* even - this cutting edge technology. Ergo, Mr or Mrs Average Gamer must purchase this new gadgetry in order to maintain a toe in the ever-flowing stream. *cue X-Files conspiracy afoot music to set the mood*

Ideally, shouldn't we expect the reverse of this situation? Games developers work with what they've got until reaching a point where they can strive no further sans a hardware upgrade, and only then look to the technology manufacturers to keep the wheels rolling. Would this not at least provide some motivation to diversify, fostering new and interesting genres rather than state of the art peep shows?

As it is, we have old titles being rehashed with more polygons, greater levels of realism and flashier special effects. Surely if people wanted to see special effects and art for art's sake they'd go to the movies, or dare I say it, an *art* gallery? How is it then that the gaming industry has managed to delude people into thinking realism and hollow imagery is what they truly desire?

Now I could well be suffering from mind-altering delusions myself, but I thought games were driven by cravings for *escapism*, not *realism*. If games get any more 'real' we'll be playing the role of characters who sit in front of their computers playing computer games. It'll be like glaring into an endless mirror image of a mirror image of a mirror. How on earth did The Sims manage to become the phenomenal success that it clearly is? Do people really want to be put in charge of people who wash the dishes, cook, mow the lawn and bath the dog? Who knows, maybe it's pandering to the whims of those chasing some sort of sadomasochistic fantasy fetish.

Just think how many great games have been ruined by the 'progress' of 3D sequels. Lemmings is one of the most innovative and entertaining games ever produced. Then look what happened; Psygnosis, clearly high on acid became one with their

own mythologised critter creations, leaping on the rickety bandwagon to devise Lemmings 3D for no apparent reason other than to follow current trends. A very average game emerged, tarnishing the reputation of the revered original (as well as the previous 2D sequels).



Exactly the same situation transpired with Syndicate. The original title remains one of the most absorbing, addictive games of all time. Then Syndicate Wars emerged looking fully-rounded in a 3D sense, which is precisely *all* it achieved. Command and Conquer - the ubiquitously-worshipped poster child of the RTS genre - fell down the same rabbit hole, the examples are endless.



Traditional, stodgy game development is now a one-dimensional - never mind 3D - matter of imitating what has sold well in the past and therefore poses minimal risk of failure. Until that changes, people will continue to be force-fed "Game X + Year of Release" forever and ever amen. When will the franchise-pushing, monolithic tycoons realise that gameplay should take precedence?

Answer: when consumers cease buying conveyor belt mentality tat and demand quality over quantity! Only then can we begin to make inroads towards injecting a bit of fun back into what, by definition, purports to be an *entertainment* industry. If plucky, independent game developers spurred by fresh, novel ideas are granted a platform to steer the market, perhaps it's not too late to turn back the tide. We certainly can't rely on the game-publishing behemoths to innovate.

So what was so remarkable about the Amiga? I hear you ask. Ah yes, I was getting to that. Aside from the games being infinitesimally more engrossing, they usually worked 'out of the box', patches existing only to expand upon core elements or offer additional levels. In those days, the ethos was to release games that work, rather than rushing them out of the door half-finished and then fixing the mistakes later while passing the extra code

off as an update instead of the bloody great Band-Aids they really are.



Multi-player games really found their niche on the Amiga. Since the systems came equipped with two input device ports, it was possible to plug in two joysticks to play against, or cooperatively *with*, a friend. If you were *really* lucky, claiming two or three of these ephemeral creatures, some games even supported additional keyboard control configurations, encouraging game parties.

When was the last time you huddled around your PC with a few mates to play a multi-player game? What is habitually now considered a solitary, anti-social even, form of entertainment, was far from it during the heady heights of the Amiga's heyday.



Workbench and Kickstart are impeccably streamlined, efficient and only perform as much as you expect them to. "How would you like me to think for you today?" isn't in their lexicon. Amigas didn't require perpetual upgrades to run the latest games. OK, we *could*, if we wanted to, buy additional peripherals and RAM, but this was entirely at our discretion. Although these extras would speed up a game or an application (remember they weren't just *games* machines), very rarely were they an essential purchase, in stark contrast to RAM and hard drive space today. In terms of hardware, the systems themselves were miniature marvels when you consider how much processing power they harboured within their all-encompassing, self-contained shells.

Ask three independent people what brought about the demise of the Amiga and you'll receive three very diverse answers. Most plausibly, Commodore went bust due to a combination of mismanagement of funds, poor hardware design progression choices and shooting themselves in the foot by not outsourcing manufacture to third parties, thereby drastically impeding their potential growth.

Whatever the final straw that ultimately crushed our metaphorical camel, the Amiga was cut down in its prime, the landscape of our computing worlds forever corrupted. Our only consolation being that the heart and soul of Jay Minor's miraculous creation lives on through the wonders of emulation.

Of course, the only thing superior to emulating an Amiga is adopting the real thing. While we're unlikely to ever again encounter brand new Amigas being sold in the high street, it's occasionally possible to buy new-old stock from a tiny number of online outlets such as Amiga Kit. Plus, when second-hand models are perennially available via eBay, there's no reasonable excuse for not embracing gaming at the pinnacle of its evolution. Remember, the path forward is not necessarily the most progressive and there's no shame in appreciating the past.